

Dougal McKinnon's Boulevard

The night was black, but not that velvety black as described by fastidious novelists who delight in placing their heroes and villains "under the shade of the inky clouds." It was the kind of dark that sets cold chills coursing up and down your spine, the kind that sharpens your imagination to such a degree that you almost see at every step, a black evil spirit rising up before you, ready to lock you in a cold, clammy embrace. And through the dark the wind tore, howling and driving itself recklessly at everything that opposed its thundering sway. Vicious and infuriated it battered old Thompson's little country store with such a force that the windows clattered and the shingles on the roof flapped incessantly.

It was a wild night, and more than one farmer gave vent to his feeling in harmless invectives as he saluted the storekeeper and bestrode his allotted cracker box, or a three legged stool if he was lucky, by the red-hot stove, where he at once fell under the influence of the prevailing atmosphere, and wearily dragged on his pipe and spat on the floor at regular intervals.

Every method known to the art of beguiling time had been tried at Thompson's little store. Excitement never meant much to them, purely through the fact that such had never been experienced in a large quantity by any member of the community. It was a word that could be discarded irretrievably from their vocabulary. Needless to say, this quality was not in the air tonight. Politics formed an interesting pastime once but presented a poor mode of diversion now, for every debatable question had been brought up long ago, vivisected, looked at from all angles, put together again, operated on, new members grafted, and then solemnly accepted as a benefit or rudely rejected as a scourge to the country. Gossip? No, this meddlesome prattle, to which femininity holds exclusive rights was also exhausted.

Old Thompson the storekeeper, a congenial and obliging person, sat on the counter thinking hard, and at the same time despairing of discovering a subject which

would inject life into the glazed eyes of the little gathering.

"Things never were so dead," he said to himself.

The old clock on the wall, blackened and smeared with the grime of ages, its face blurred and cracked, spoke in low, dreary tones. Nine o'clock it said. The men stirred restlessly. Some thrust their arms into the air and yawned while others gaped at the clock, plainly in dire distress, for the hour was late, very late.

Dougal McKinnon straightened for an instant, fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a knife, falling back immediately on his knees. He took his pipe from his mouth and slowly scraped its burnt contents on the floor. Blowing vigorously through the stem, he glanced across the glowing-hot stove, and fell to cutting a plug of "Shamrock."

"Tomorrow's Friday Pat. Goin' to town?" he asked.

"Yes got to," drawled Patrick Lynch in slow deliberate tones. "Hate to though. Rather take a trip below. Roads are in a desperate condition."

"De'ye know I was thinkin'," said Dougal, "a kind of a boulevard would be a great benefit to us farmers. A good, hard road that would run through the island. It would be of great use to you tomorrow Pat."

Everybody simultaneously lifted themselves from their knees and looked at Dougal. Old Thompson's feet, which dangled some inches from the floor, ceased punching the bag of meal, and his hand which gently stroked his gray goatee, paused and remained there gripping the extreme ends of the longest hairs. He was surprised into a pose. The unexpected had happened and the prospects of an argument exhibited themselves.

Old Thompson smiled for he had witnessed the results of similar questions brought up for discussion around the stove. Many a war had taken place under his very nose, and many a time he had been called upon to hand down a decision from the high throne of justice, the counter. He blinked his eyes and continued to massage his beard, wondering how far Dougal would

carry his argument and speculating the outcome if it should develop into a general discussion.

"Can't say but I would like to have that road to go to town on tomorrow," Pat slowly replied after minutes of thoughtful deliberation. "The roads ain't none too good for heavy haulin' this time of the year."

"Yes," Dougal agreed, "practically impossible to haul our produce to market now. When we leave home we're never sure of returnin' with a sound horse and an undamaged wagin. Last Tuesday my mare wallowed in mud up to her fetlocks all the way into town, but at Royalty the mud was up to her knees. We've tolerated such roads long enough. Year in and year out we are agoin' over the same roads, cursin' and swearin' when we come to bad places and never thinking of ways to improve them."

"Hem." There was a silence. "Hem." This last interjection which was a little louder and more vehement than the previous, seemed to clear Malcolm Currie's throat of whatever impediments to speech that cleaved there. He was a tall, spare farmer, uncompromising and unyielding. It has been said that Malcolm while arguing never struck his colors for any man, and invariably clung to his own ideas whether right or wrong for a lie, dressed up, rehearsed, and imparted with sufficient volubility, will travel just as far as the truth (in some places).

"Now tell us Malcolm" he said puffing strenuously at his pipe, "just what kind of a road you want."

"That's right," shouted the storekeeper. There was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes and his lips were half parted in a smile.

"The road I think proper," Dougal began, "would be a road made of the best material that can be obtained. It will have to connect both ends of our island, say Tignish and Souris, and should be intersected by all roads leading from the principal towns. These crossroads will of course be improved, thus forming a perfect network of good roads over the whole island. I was reading in the Montreal Star the other day that the International Road which is being built from Quebec to

Miami, Florida will be macadamized. If macadamized roads are the best, this road has got to be macadamized.

A lull came over the little assemblage. Some deeming the plan reasonable nodded their heads, others gazed pensively at the fire, while some regarded Malcolm in an effort to ascertain what effect Dougal had made upon him.

"No doubt it will make an excellent highway—for automobiles to go mad on, said Patrick Lynch."

"Yes," snapped Malcolm endeavoring to amplify Lynch's comment. He was always stronger and had more confidence in himself when he had a supporter. "An excellent road for automobiles to speed over. When this island, Dougal, spends money on roads for automobiles you'll be raising billie goats without whiskers."

"Certainly it would be an excellent road for automobiles," assented Dougal. "The very thing we want. If it is excellent for automobiles it must be at least good for wagins. A team bears no spite against an automobile and the feeling the other way is about the same. They both can use the same road without quarrelin'. As for speedin' we have laws and can easily regulate that. But we're not interested in automobiles. The main purpose of building this boulevard would be to give us farmers a hard road for haulin' and for pleasure drivin', a hard road all the year round. We can have this road if we want it, and we just got to have it.

"Wouldn't such a road be a big improvement over the present roads? Look at them now. The mud is axle deep and in the fall they are every bit as bad. We are receiving a yearly grant from the Dominion Government for the purpose of building roads, and our fox industry is pouring money into the local treasury." Dougal was heated. His voice waxed strong. "Why not use this money in benefitting us farmers? We made the country what it is today and our comforts above all others should be cared for."

"Here, here," several shouted in a fever of excitement and old Thompson's heels unconsciously beat a tatoo on the side of the counter. Harold Rogers, a

welly-nelly sort of a person who suffered intensely for the lack of brains, shouted lustily, and in an ecstasy of delight, grimaced horribly at Malcolm.

Alas, Malcolm Currie was silenced. He looked gloomily at Patrick Lynch who in turn looked at him, and they tacitly agreed between themselves that they had said sufficient.

"And for tourists." Timothy Delaney's cheeks swelled and he blustered his quid of tobacco in the direction of the coalhod. It came very near entering it. "The road will bring them here thicker'n bees. The tourists come here for the Island's natural scenery. How many more will come if they can use their automobiles to view this scenery? It will be a paradise for them coming from the dusty——"

"Time to be gittin' home boys," said Old Thompson lowering himself from the counter. The little gathering moved towards the door and walked up the road, Delaney's voice still audible in the general discussion which had now taken place.

The lock clicked and Thompson placed the key back into his pocket.

"Too bad," he mumbled as he buttoned his coat around his neck and started for home, "that Dougal McKinnon didn't bring up that road plan earlier."

OSCAR BAMBERSTEIN.

"I sometimes wonder if life is worth living," mused the pessimist.

"It is," replied the optimist; "it is worth living much better than most of us live it."

It is in the power of every wise man, if he pleases, to be as eminent for virtue as for talent.